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Message Text

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13-11
ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 IO-13

/069 W
---------- 067685
R 100711Z AUG 76
FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5923
INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
AMEMBASSY MANILA
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY CANBERRA
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SINGAPORE 3766

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: AS, US, PT, ID, IN
SUBJ: AUSTRALIAN PRESS FLAPS OVER US POLICY TOWARDS INDONESIA

1. IN CALL TO MELBOURNE AGE CORRESPONDENT MICHAEL RICHARDSON ON OTHER MATTER, EMBASSY INFORMATION OFFICER HAD CHANCE TO MENTION HIS STORY ON ALLEGED US WARNINGS TO AUSTRALIA OVER TIMOR SITUATION AND ITS RELATIONS WITH INDONESIA. WHILE NOT GIVING AWAY SOURCES, RICHARDSON EMPHASIZED SOURCES ACCURATELY DES-CRIBED AS "US OFFICIALS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA". THIS COULD MEAN THAT THE STORY WAS PATCHED TOGETHER FROM SEVERAL SOURCES OR THAT IT CAME FROM OTHER SEA CAPITAL (RICHARDSON TRAVELS EXTENSIVELY IN THE AREA). RICHARDSON FURTHER SAID THAT "IN CANBERRA" WAS INEXPLICABLY ADDED TO LINE "REPRESENTATIONS MADE THROUGH DIPLOMATIC CHANNELS" BY HIS EDITORS IN AUSTRALIA.

2. THIS EMBASSY WAS NOT AWARE OF ANY REPRESENTATIONS WHICH MAY HAVE BEEN MADE TO GOA ON ITS RELATIONS WITH INDONESIA,
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AND OUR ONLY RECENT CONTACT WITH RICHARDSON CONCERNED HIS

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INTEREST IN USS RANGER'S RECENT FORAY INTO INDIAN OCEAN.

3. FYI. EMBASSY DOES NOT RULE OUT POSSIBILITY THAT INITIAL SOURCE BEHIND MELBOURNE STORY MAY HAVE BEEN DEPUTY AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSIONER RICHARD BUTLER. NEW NATION REPORTED ON JULY 24 THAT BUTLER WOULD LEAVE SINGAPORE IN AUGUST TO TAKE UP A NEW APPOINTMENT AS GOUGH WHITLAM'S PRINCIPAL PRIVATE SECRETARY. FROM PREVIOUS DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN EMBASSY OFFICERS AND BUTLER, IT WAS VERY CLEAR THAT HE STRONGLY DISAPPROVED INDONESIAN TAKE-OVER OF TIMOR AND THOUGHT HIS GOVERNMENT SHOULD TAKE A STRONG POSITION VIS-A-VIS INDONESIA ON THIS SUBJECT.

4. IT IS QUITE POSSIBLE AUSTRALIAN HICOM HERE WOULD HAVE RECEIVED FEEDBACK FROM CANBERRA OF ANY U.S. REPRESENTATIONS TO GOA ON THIS SUBJECT. BUTLER IS AN ARDENT LABORITE AND MAKES LITTLE EFFORT TO CONCEAL HIS SYMPATHIES (FOR EXAMPLE, WHEN GOVERNOR GENERAL OF AUSTRALIA SACKED WHITLAM AND CALLED FOR NEW ELECTIONS, BUTLER OPENLY CRITICIZED THIS ACTION AT DIPLOMATIC COCKTAIL PARTIES AS A "COUP D'ETAT FROM THE TOP"). BUTLER HAS ON OCCASION EXPRESSED OPPOSITION TO CERTAIN AMERICAN POLICIES AND GIVEN HIS STRONG VIEWS ON TIMOR PROBLEM, HE PRESUMABLY WOULD HAVE BEEN VERY MUCH OPPOSED TO ANY U.S. EFFORT TO CAUTION AUSTRALIA CONCERNING ITS POLICY TOWARD INDONESIA. IN VIEW OF THESE FACTORS WE THINK IT IS QUITE POSSIBLE BUTLER MAY HAVE GIVEN RICHARDSON SOME ACCOUNT OF ANY U.S. REPRESENTATIONS TO GOA ON THIS SUBJECT. RICHARDSON HIMSELF ALSO FEELS VERY STRONGLY ABOUT THE INDONESIAN TAKE-OVER OF TIMOR AND SAYS HE PLANS TO WRITE A BOOK ON THE SUBJECT. IT IS POSSIBLE HIS EMOTIONAL ATTITUDE MAY HAVE OUTWEIGHED HIS RESPONSIBILITY AS A JOURNALIST, AND THAT HE CITED U.S. SOURCES IN EFFORT TO PROTECT BUTLER, OR USED INFORMATION TO QUERY U.S. OFFICIALS ELSEWHERE IN THE REGION. HE MIGHT HAVE USED A FAILURE TO DENY THE STORY AS CONSTITUTING CONFIRMATION. END FYI.

5. EMBASSY MUST STRESS THAT HYPOTHESIS ADVANCED PARAS 3 AND 4 IS BASED ON SPECULATION AND THAT WE HAVE NO CONCRETE EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT IT. HOWEVER, WE HAVE A STRONG FEELING IN OUR BONES THAT BUTLER WAS BEHIND IT. HOLDRIDGE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: TERRITORIAL UNIFICATION, JOURNALISTS, FOREIGN POLICY POSITION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 10 AUG 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: BoyleJA
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976SINGAP03766
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760307-0187
From: SINGAPORE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760868/aaaachpi.tel
Line Count: 98
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: BoyleJA
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 24 MAY 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <24 MAY 2004 by SmithRJ>; APPROVED <15 SEP 2004 by BoyleJA>
Review Markings:

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US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: AUSTRALIAN PRESS FLAPS OVER US POLICY TOWARDS INDONESIA
TAGS: PFOR, AS, US, PT, ID, IN, (BUTLER, RICHARD), (RICHARDSON, MICHAEL)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006